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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

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against Women (CEDAW)

CONSIDERATION OF REPORTS SUBMITTED BY STATES PARTIES
UNDER ARTICLE 18 OF THE CONVENTION

Initial, second and third periodic reports of States parties

ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES

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1. With the declaration of the United Nations Decade for Women, the Government of St. Vincent and the Grenadines saw it timely to establish the Women's Affairs Department.

2. The Department was established in 1985 in the Ministry of Tourism, Aviation, Culture and Women's Affairs. At that time there was only one member of staff, the Co-ordinator. The Department's staff was later extended to include an Assistant Co-ordinator and provisions made in the Department's structure for the position of Project Field Officer - a position which has remained vacant even up to today.

3. In the estimates of St. Vincent and the Grenadines the objectives of the Department are outlined as follows:-

> "To foster attitudinal changes in Vincentian men and women to enhance the integration of women into National Development and lead to the attainment of Equality Development and Peace".

4. The establishment of this special mechanism within the system is serving as a focal point for women's issues. The Department's basic functions therefore include:-

a) Education & Training
b) Public Awareness
c) Research & Documentation
d) Advocacy
e) Counselling

5. In addition the Department co-ordinates technical and financial assistance for women's programmes and projects.

6. The Department is hoping that through its training programmes women would have accomplished increased awareness of their rights, including some degree of legal literacy. To facilitate this further the Department hopes to publish legislation that affect women in a form that all women could interpret.

7. Measures to eradicate violence against women in the family and the wider society have also been undertaken. Leaflets examining the issues of:

- Rape
- Domestic Violence
- Wife beating/Assault etc. have been published and distributed.

8. Research work in domestic violence has also been undertaken and the information disseminated through a symposium.

9. Further, several workshops have been conducted to sensitize planners/policy makers on the importance of gender awareness/issues in development planning.

10. The Department has also seen it fit to establish a library service for women in particular but also extends this service to interested males.

11. There is also collaboration with national and international institutions and women's non-governmental organizations.

12. Apart from the establishment of the Women's Affairs Department no specific legal instrument has been adopted to implement the Convention.

13. Although provisions might be made to provide equality of opportunities for women, there still cannot be any legal redress if any discriminatory practices arize.

14. Since the coming into being of the Convention, there has been no constitutional changes. However, some discriminating laws have been either removed or amended and new laws introduced.

LEGISLATIVE AND JUDICIAL

15. In relation to laws affecting women there have been some changes to the advantage of women.

16. The following are examples of some of these laws:-

1. Income Tax Amendment Act 1984 - section 13 was repealed
2. Adoption of Children Act
3. Domestic Violence & Matrimonial Proceedings Act
4. Matrimonial Homes Act
5. St. Vincent and the Grenadines Citizenship Act
6. Criminal Code

17. The Criminal Code now makes it easier to address the whole question of sexual offence. The term Carnal Knowledge has been deleted and replaced by having sex with a child under thirteen (13) and under fifteen (15).

18. Maximum punishment for these offences differ/range from life imprisonment to fourteen (14) years respectively.

19. Although several calls have been made for the implementation of a Family Court and Legal Aid Clinic, nothing has yet been done.

20. With the introduction of the National Insurance Scheme (NIS) provision has now been made for maternity leave for all permanent workers and contributors to the Scheme. Female teachers have benefitted tremendously since previously they would have had to resign their jobs at six months of pregnancy and then re-apply after the birth of the baby with no guarantee for reinstatement.

21. Inequality that once existed in wages between male and female workers is non-existent. This was made possible with the introduction of the following Statutory Rules & Order referred to hereafter as SRO.

SRO # 10 of 89 - Industrial Workers;
11 of 89 - Shop Assistant;
12 of 89 - Domestic Worker; and
13 of 89 - Sheltered and Unsheltered Worker

EDUCATION

22. Even though education is considered to be an important instrument for reducing inequality among the sexes many practices within the system continue to support inequality.

i) The curricula of primary and secondary schools continue to support sex role stereotyping. Girls are still encouraged to do home economics and boys industrial arts, auto mechanics etc. The sex stereotyped school curricula therefore conditions girls to a limited perception of their potential.

ii) There is need for the establishment of polytechnic institutes that cater primarily for women.

iii) Many scholarships are offered and a high percentage of women are selected but much needs to be done in terms of making the information available to women since the information is not given to the Women's Affairs Department.

iv) The overall social attitude towards women require drastic changes.

v) Above all many Vincentian women continue to be unskilled and functionally illiterate.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC

23. The situation of inequality is still evident even though a "handful" of women have managed to climb to the top echelon in their profession.

24. Many women are still accorded low wages, low status and little opportunity for developing themselves economically.

25. As yet no mechanism has been put in place to record all female labour in the official statistics of the country.

26. Economic planners continue to focus on the reproductive roles of women and have tended to ignore their role as producers.

27. The rigid division of labour in most homes still require that home-making functions are assisted by either her male partner or offsprings.

28. There is no officially declared national policy even though the Department is presently working on a draft policy statement for women.

29. While the government's Land Reform Programme is attempting to assist rural women to access more lands thus putting them in a position to broaden their economic base, the Department feels that not enough women are benefitting.

30. Collaboration by Women's Affairs with leading NGO's has led to the establishment of a Women's Bank, managed by women to provide loans to women setting up their own business.

POLITICS

31. The country has seen an upsurge in the number of female politicians. At present there are two female parliamentarians and one senator. Females are free to partake in political activities, they can vote freely and show allegiance to whatever party they choose.